

in the Senate, I have made the readiness of the XVIII Airborne one of my top priorities. In fact, you would think it would be everybody's top priority, but I have watched budget cutters in the Air Force slowly chip away at the ability of the commanders at Fort Bragg to adequately train their paratroopers at Pope Army Airfield.

This year, the Air Force began dismantling the one Air Force tactical unit at Pope—the 440th Airlift Wing—capable of providing daily and ad hoc support for Fort Bragg soldiers. I said at the time that the removal of the 440th created unreasonable risks to the readiness of critical airborne units. They must be prepared to respond to a range of contingencies in very short timeframes. I have pointed out repeatedly that the deactivation of the 440th comes at a time when the Nation is facing growing uncertainty and increasing threats abroad that could require a military response, and it is a response that only forces at Fort Bragg can fulfill.

Over the last 7 years, the 440th has provided the Army with unparalleled support, tailored training opportunities without the tyranny of distance that comes through logistical, bureaucratic, and operational delays by having aircraft stationed somewhere other than Pope Army Airfield.

The Air Force leadership stated that after any deactivation of the 440th, out-of-State aircraft would support all airlift requirements for Fort Bragg units at Pope. The Air Force asked me to suspend disbelief. They told me to accept that it is more cost-effective for units to fly from Little Rock, AK, or McChord Air Force Base in Washington State and support Fort Bragg in North Carolina rather than having planes stationed at Fort Bragg.

I did my best to ensure that the Air Force understood the Army's requirements, and I promised them that if they removed the 440th, I would be monitoring their progress and their ability to satisfy the Army's requirements for as long as I am in the Senate.

The first warning signs that the Air Force was in trouble came in December at the annual Operation Toy Drop. Operation Toy Drop is the world's largest combined airborne operation at Fort Bragg. The drop is actually a daytime, nontactical, airborne operation supervised by foreign military jumpmasters. They view it as a rare treat to participate so that they can get jump wings from a foreign country.

This year's operation was purposefully designed by the Air Force to prove to Congress—to prove to me—that they could support the training mission at Fort Bragg. To prove the point, the Air Force Reserve went so far as to reduce the 440th's role in the operation. However, when the Air Force planes could not get to Pope because of weather, mechanical, or other delays, the 440th had to step in and make up the deficit, as they have done so many times before.

This is the real world in action. Bad weather and mechanical problems happen. The Air Force knows this exercise happens every year. They know it is highly visible. They knew they were under a microscope. Still they couldn't meet the requirement. In fact, during Operation Toy Drop, the 440th provided for about 40 percent of the chutes and 43 percent of the lift for the entire operation.

Fort Bragg leadership has been clear to the Air Force in terms of their combat requirements, their training requirements at Fort Bragg. They have told the Air Force that they have to drop 10,000 paratroopers a month. Eight thousand drops a month is considered the bare minimum for the XVIII Airborne Corps. Sadly, the Air Force is not meeting those requirements. Only 6,100 paratroopers exited from Air Force planes in March. That is 1,300 fewer paratroopers dropped than in February, which is 77 percent of the 8,000 sustainable threshold and 61 percent of the Army's overall requirement. Where I went to high school, 61 percent was a D-minus, bordering on an F. They are failing.

The Air Force has missed the Army's minimum jump requirements every month this year. These numbers are illuminating and concerning because in the Southeast, this is the best flying weather. January, February, and March have the best flying weather in the Southeast. What is going to happen when the Southeast thunderstorms and tornado season kicks in? If the Air Force can't meet Fort Bragg's need when the skies are clear, how is it going to do when the storm clouds gather?

I hope the Air Force knows I have their back as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. But in this case, this is about fulfilling the Army's requirement. This is about me having the Army's back. This is about making sure the men and women who will be asked at a moment's notice to assemble on the Green Ramp at the Pope Army Airfield and go wherever they must go to defend freedom and save lives are at their highest state of readiness. But the performance to this point suggests that the Air Force is failing its customer service to the Army. No business in America would be able to dictate to the customer how and when they are going to get their product, but that is exactly what is happening with the Air Force's relationship with the Army—and they are failing.

I will ask Senator MCCAIN to inquire as to whether the Air Force expects to meet the needs of the Global Response Force. They haven't in this first quarter, and this is the first quarter that they were trying to transition to a Pope Army Airfield without the 440th. If they can't answer the question, then it is time for us to consider other options.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ENERGY AND WATER APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, when Republicans took the majority in the Senate last January, we were determined to get the Senate working again.

By 2014, the Democratic-controlled Senate had largely ground to a halt. Serious legislation had been replaced by political messaging, and the Democratic leadership refused to allow votes on amendments. In short, despite Democratic control of the Senate, Democrats and Republicans alike were shut out of the legislative process. Republicans were determined to change that.

Since we took control of the Senate in 2015, we have focused on taking up substantial legislation that addresses the challenges facing the country. We have made sure individual appropriations bills get written in committees with input from Senators of both parties, and we have opened the Senate floor to debate and amendment.

Why is that important? Because an open legislative process in the Senate means all Americans get represented. When legislation is written in the open using the committee process and Senators have a chance to highlight their constituents' concerns, the final bill is a lot more likely to reflect the American people's priorities.

One of our most basic responsibilities as Members of Congress is to pass appropriations bills. Appropriations bills give Senators and Congressmen a chance to take a look at where taxpayer dollars are being spent and how we can spend this money more efficiently and effectively. Unfortunately, too often Congress ends up skipping the appropriations process and rolling a number of the appropriations bills into one giant spending bill. That means we lose the opportunity to closely examine our spending priorities and make sure we are spending money wisely.

Since we took control of the Senate, Republicans have been determined to make sure Congress takes the appropriations process seriously. We have made sure individual appropriations bills are developed in committee, where Senators of both parties have the opportunity to help develop the bill and make sure their constituents' concerns are heard.

This week Congress is taking up the Energy and Water appropriations bill. This legislation funds a number of priorities: rural water projects, critical infrastructure projects, nuclear deterrence efforts, energy research, flood control, and environmental cleanup, to name a few. I am particularly pleased

that this bill funds important projects—like the Lewis & Clark Regional Water System—that will help provide communities with access to steady, reliable water sources.

I am also pleased that this bill invests in next-generation, high-energy physics research, including the Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment, which could revolutionize our understanding of some of the most fundamental elements of our universe. This funding demonstrates continued U.S. commitment to a project that will help train the next generation of scientists and engineers, retain and attract the best scientific minds to the United States, and garner additional investment from global partners. I am proud that South Dakota's Sanford Underground Research Facility will continue to play a leading role in this major international scientific effort.

The Energy and Water appropriations bill passed the Senate Appropriations Committee with the unanimous—unanimous—support of Democrats and Republicans with a 30-to-0 vote. I am hoping it will receive the same strong bipartisan support on the Senate floor. This bill will boost our Nation's energy security, making our economy more competitive, and promote energy innovation. It will help us produce more and pay less for energy.

This legislation is an important first step in our commitment to restore order to the appropriations process, and I look forward to consideration of additional appropriations bills on the Senate floor in the coming weeks.

RECOGNIZING THE RAPID CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT AND THE PENNINGTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I wish to take a few minutes to talk about the two ride-alongs I was privileged to take with Rapid City, SD, law enforcement officers at the end of March.

We live in a climate where police officers are often made to sound like criminals and criminals are often portrayed as victims. The result is, we forget about the real victims—the people who have suffered crimes or are forced to live in crime-ridden neighborhoods—and we forget about the work police officers do in making our communities places we can live.

Three weeks ago, I got to meet with law enforcement officers from the Rapid City Police Department and the Pennington County Sheriff's Office. After our meeting, I got to take a ride through Rapid Valley with Sheriff's Deputy Brandon Akley and a ride through Rapid City with Rapid City Police Officer Jim Hansen.

Not very long ago, some neighborhoods in Rapid City had their share of challenges. Law enforcement officers frequently responded to drug and alcohol calls, abuse calls, domestic violence, break-ins, and other violent crimes. Imagine what it is like to live

in a neighborhood like that. Coming home after dark is dangerous. It may not be safe for your children to play in the yard. It is certainly not safe to send them to the playground. Your children constantly see things no child should see and hear things no child should have to hear. Your property isn't secure. Your car and your home are at risk all the time. There are no economic opportunities in your area because businesses don't want to locate in areas where it is not safe to do business. That is what life is like in some of these neighborhoods. In one instance in Rapid City, law enforcement officers responded to over 600 calls to one building over a period of a single year.

By partnering with residents in impacted neighborhoods, Rapid City law enforcement stepped in and conducted an aggressive, years-long campaign to rid this area of crime. Today, residents can let their children play outside without fear, and new economic opportunities are opening for residents as businesses move in. It is no exaggeration to say that what these police officers did changed the lives of countless Rapid City residents.

Every day, in every community in the United States, the men and women who make up our Nation's police forces and sheriff's departments put their lives on the line for the rest of us. They are first on the scene when someone is in danger, the first to come running when you call for help, and when evil threatens they step in.

I am grateful to the men and women of the Rapid City Police Department, the Pennington County Sheriff's Office, and to all the law enforcement officers keeping the peace in South Dakota and around the Nation. Because of their service, we can live in safety.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING ANNIVERSARY AND NOMINATION OF MERRICK GARLAND

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I come to the Senate floor to once again urge my Republican colleagues to do what they are elected to do: listen to their constituents and give Judge Garland the fair consideration he deserves.

As some of my colleagues have already noted, today marks 21 years since the Oklahoma City bombing, an attack that shocked the world and took 168 innocent lives. I had the honor of meeting with an individual last week who was not only involved in the immediate aftermath of this terrible attack but who went above and beyond

to make sure justice was served on behalf of those who lost their lives.

Judge Merrick Garland, the President's nominee for the Supreme Court, was at the scene of the bombing within 2 days. With debris from the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building still smoldering in the streets, Judge Garland was helping first responders and working with local law enforcement.

As a top official in the Justice Department, he led a massive investigation of the bombing and supervised the prosecution of Timothy McVeigh. He did all of that, even if it meant more work and more time away from his family, with incredible delicacy and thoroughness. He called his work for the Justice Department following the Oklahoma City bombing the most important thing he has ever done in his life.

As we remember those who were lost on that day in 1995, and in light of last week being National Crime Victims' Rights Week, we remember how Judge Garland honored those victims with his dedicated service. Judge Garland not only did his job with a great deal of heart, working with families who had lost loved ones, but with the vigor to demand that justice be served. His fairness and diligence earned him praise from Members of both parties, from victims' families and law enforcement officers, and even from the lead lawyer defending McVeigh.

A person like that, driven by the desire to help people and serve the public, is someone who deserves fair consideration by all of us in the U.S. Senate. Unfortunately, that is not what is happening right now. We are 66 days into the Supreme Court vacancy, and so far Republican leaders are still refusing to do their jobs. They will not say they are opposed to Judge Garland. They are refusing to even live up to their constitutional responsibility and consider him. That kind of pure obstruction and partisanship is absolutely wrong. People across the country are not going to stand for that.

Last week I met with Judge Garland and talked through his background, his experiences, his philosophy, his judicial philosophy. What I found out—and it would be difficult for any right-minded person not to come to this conclusion after meeting with him—is that Judge Garland is highly passionate, he is highly respected, and highly qualified to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

I am very glad some Republicans have started meeting with him. That is a great first step, but it cannot be the last step. Families across this country deserve to hear from Judge Garland in a Judiciary Committee hearing, under oath, and in public, and then he should get a vote where every Senator will have the opportunity to do their job and weigh in.

If any Member doesn't think Judge Garland should serve on the highest Court in the land, they should feel free to vote against him, but give him a